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Monday Morning NewsBud

GROWING YOUR BUSINESS TOGETHER

TOP 10 TRENDS IN SMALL BUSINESS

Continuing on with the 2010 edition of the [Top 10 trends in Small Business](#) from 2 weeks ago.. This week we get to the Top 5.

5. Social Media Grows Up: Have you noticed that "social media" is a term that doesn't really describe the experience that we'll have anymore? Yes it's social, and yes it's media, but for business it has become so much more than that. Tapping, nay, mastering, social media is one of the hottest of all online trends:

- Everyone from Jet Blue to Comcast has turned to Twitter as a customer service tool.
- Companies like Whole Foods and Popeys increasingly use it to get feedback, post company news, etc.
- Big business has discovered what many small businesses already know: Facebook is a great place to advertise. "Facebook" in fact was the most searched term in 2009. (Source: [Experian](#))

Hop on the social media train, Jane, because it's headed out of the station at light speed.

4. Going Local: Consumers are increasingly looking for a local angle when looking where to spend their hard-earned dollar. Example: The explosion of farmers markets across the country. According to *Entrepreneur*, "there are almost 5,000 farmers markets across the country, the result of more than 5% annual growth for the past five years."

Additionally, with people staying closer to home right now because of the economy, with folks focused ever more on community and family, and with the green ethos growing, home is where the heart (and dollar) is. This is a good opportunity for florists. Sue your local florist not some online entity that exists in cyberspace with no bricks and mortar presence.

3. Sharing vs. Shared Experiences: According to a recent NPR podcast, we used to share national experiences. The nightly news was a shared ritual for instance. The [OJ](#) trial was a shared experience, the same with Vietnam, and so on.

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But that is changing, for two reasons. The first is the fragmentation of the media. With innumerable news outlets, websites, cable channels, mobile options and the like, the opportunity to create shared experiences is diminishing. We are all not watching or experiencing the same thing nearly as much.

Secondly, with the advent of easy to generate user-created content, sharing experiences and opinions is becoming ever more prevalent. YouTube, blogs, Facebook, Yelp, email even, all contribute to both the media fragmentation as well as the sharing culture.

For the small business person, it is vital to realize that 1) people look for, and increasingly expect, the personal, and 2) small, localized, immediate user-created media are where the eyeballs are headed.

2. Mobile Mania: Maybe the only marketing trend that is hotter than social media is mobile mania. Why? Maybe because there are four-times more cellphones than PCs worldwide, or because they are the favorite product of Gen Y, or because in 2000, there were almost no texts sent but this year, 130 billion texts will be sent a *month*, and only 23% of those will come from my daughters.

So yes, mobile marketing is exploding. Whether it is creating the Next Big App, offering customers a real-time mobile coupon, or creating a text marketing campaign, in 2010 there will be mobile options galore for small business.

Even better maybe: The variety of ways to measure the success of your mobile campaign. According to the Mobile Marketing Association, they will include: "The number of eyeballs, shakes and finger swipes. The number of blogs, articles, tweets and diggs. The number of acquisitions, conversions, calls, responses or purchases. Total basket size, consumer recall, loyalty and recommendations. Check-ins on foursquare and check-outs on Amazon."

It is a new world indeed.

1. The Start-Up Economy: Last year, 2009, my top trend was entitled "Economic Tumult," and tumultuous it indeed turned out to be; the Great Recession is great in all the wrong ways.

But this year, while the state of the economy will continue to be the most significant trend effecting small business, the outlook is both brighter and calmer. It is calmer because things are slowly getting back to, if not normal, at least something recognizable. And it is brighter because out of the rubble, a new, vital, innovative start-up economy is being born.

We have entered the era of small business. Whereas GM president Charles Wilson once said "What's good for the country is good for GM, and vice versa," it can now safely be said that what is good for small business is good for the country. Consider these statistics.

Small businesses now

- Employ more than half of all workers
- Constitute 96.7% of all employers
- Constitute 97% of all exporters
- Create the majority of business innovations

Source: Today

MYSTERY SHOPPING PROGRAM: HOW TO MAKE IT WORK FOR YOUR BUSINESS

I wish I had a nickel for every time someone said to me, "Oh, you do Mystery Shopping; I always wanted to do that!" I think most people do find the thought of posing as a customer and reporting back on how they were treated, rather intriguing. But there is a lot more to it than skulking around in a trench coat and spy glass!

I believe most companies have taken the plunge and decided that it really is important to conduct frequent "mystery or secret shops" of their businesses. The question remains, do they do anything constructive with the information or is it used as a disciplinary tool?

Before you start having people snoop around your company, consider the following clues that will help guarantee a successful program.

1. What's the Value in a Mystery Shopper Program?

a. The most important reason for conducting a mystery shop, is to see your business through the eyes of your customer.

Not only should you consider mystery shops, but using focus groups on a quarterly basis that are made up of some of your actual customers. Both sources will provide you with excellent feedback that you can start to focus on.

b. Second, a well-thought out mystery shopper program will allow you to evaluate the accuracy of your training program.

If your employees are taught in their training program that they must greet the customer in a certain way, the "shop" will show the results. It is also a way to hold employees accountable for what they learned in training. If you train them you can test them!

c. Third, it helps a company to truly focus on the areas that need improving, based on the customer's reactions.

Too often management believes that there needs to be changes in one area and the customer feedback shows that the focus needs to be elsewhere in order to keep them as a loyal customer. Management may think that tightly merchandising their floor space is giving the customer the selection they want, and it turns out that the customer says it is too cramped to shop comfortably.

2. Should I do a Mystery Shop Without the Employees Knowing?

a. Pop Quiz!

How many of us read those words and remember a grumpy teacher walking in the classroom to a group of rowdy kids, slamming her book on the desk and bellowing, "Ok, take out a sheet of paper we're going to have a pop quiz.," Panic just struck your soul! The same thing happens with employees. In addition you have just thrown any trust you have built with your employee's right out the window. If you want to build a team, let the players know the game plan!

b. Explain to your employees why you are planning a mystery shop.

Explain in a positive way that it is part of the "on going" training program of the company and that the best way to improve business is to find out what the customer really wants. Explain also, that it is a way to hold the employees responsible for the information they were provided in any and all of their training programs. Employees are far less likely to be upset with the results of what they were tested on if they had sufficient time to "study"!

c. Your employees are part of your team.

Give them the tools to be successful everyday and they will jump through every hoop you provide. It reminds me of a time my son was on a soccer team. He was five years old and this was a perfect sport to expend that energy that all five year olds seem to have pent up inside. I remember one Saturday game the coach was trying to remind the boys about the drills they had learned at practice. Game time for this age group is what I call, "like herding cats"! The boys were so excited they couldn't wait to get on that field and show the coach what they had learned. All of a sudden one of the little boys got the soccer ball and was moving the ball down field as fast as he could. The parents were screaming, the coach was jumping up and down and his teammates were following in hot pursuit! As the little boy kicked the goal everyone went crazy! The little boys face just beamed as he came to the sidelines!

But the coach didn't have that same delight on his face! The coach said, "You kicked the ball into the other team's goal!!!!" Agggh!!! But the little boy snapped back as any five year old would, "You never told me which way the goal was"!

How many times have we forgotten to tell our team which way the goal is!

3. Where Do I Start?

a. Slow down and think, is my answer.

First, think about the information you really want to obtain from these reports and what are you going to do with it. The questions you want to ask are one of the most important parts of the program. The best place to obtain the questions is to go back to the training material. Remember what I said earlier, if you train them you can test them.

You probably have, what I call, non-negotiable questions that you can begin with. Those are the things you teach employees that must be done, no matter what. If you want to attach points to the questions, then you can give more points to the questions that you want your employees to be the best at. Let's say answering the phone in a certain way is mandatory. If they know that, and they are held responsible for doing that, then you should have it on the questionnaire and you can feel confident about attaching a higher number of points to it.

In most companies, there are three or four areas that they like to have the shoppers give feedback on. The first area is usually the facility. Was the location easy to find? Was the entrance neat and clean? Did I feel safe parking after dark? Was the interior of the location attractive? Was it easy for me to find what I was looking for? The next area usually covered is the inventory or merchandising of the store. Was the signing helpful? Was the business in stock on what I needed? Was it easy for me to shop? The last one is usually the area of service. How was I greeted? Was the employee easy to find? Was the employee knowledgeable? Did the employee make me feel special? Again, these questions can be as many or as few as you think is important to get the feedback that you need.

b. The next step is to hire the shoppers.

This can make or break your program. Too often companies think they are saving money by hiring friends and family. I suggest that you hire people you don't know. You are looking for unbiased feedback and the best way is to hire the right people for it. I recommend going to the Mystery Shopper Provider Association website for the listing of good companies to use.

You can hire a company to coordinate your entire shopper program, or you may try doing it yourself if you have a small company and want to try it first on your own. If you are choosing to find shoppers on your own to use your own materials, then I suggest Shadow Shopper.com. They have a massive database and it can be accessed by zip code. I will suggest, however, that you use the same techniques you use when hiring any employee. Call the potential shopper and interview them extensively just as if you were hiring a person to work for your company on a full or part time basis. You will get a good feel over the phone about their communication and grammar skills that I feel is so important in providing a company the proper feedback.

c. Lastly, I am always asked, "How often should I do a "shop" and how much should I expect to pay?"

I believe consistency is key. If you are looking at saving money you can always choose to do your shops, randomly. Pay is usually based on the length of time it takes the shopper to do the "shop" from the time they leave their house until they get back. Pay can range from \$25 per shop on up.

So depending on budget and whether you choose to do them weekly, monthly or randomly, make them a pivotal part of an on-going training program and do not do it for less than one year. That may translate into 12 shops to 365 shops, but either way you must ask yourself how much information would you like to have and how important could this be to your day to day business. We all know what happens when we say we are going to lose weight or exercise more or get organized, it is failure in the making if we are not dedicated to being consistent.

4. How Do I Give The Bad News?

The problem with mystery shopper programs is that they get a very bad rap from those employees who have been shopped because the results have been used as punishment. I tell clients that this program is not a "stick"! It is not meant to create fear in the minds of your employees. If that is your goal, you better re-think your management style.

a. Praise first!

Go through the report before you bring your employee in. Make sure you are well-versed in at least 3-5 things they are doing well. Praise them for those things and remind them to continue the good work.

b. Corrections second.

Make note of no more than 3 areas they can improve in. Negative comments do not motivate as well as comments such as, "Well the mystery shopper found what I always have known, you sit behind the desk the whole time I'm gone". Use the word "we" in your conversation with your employee, such as "We have seen through our reports that we all need to be working at making better eye contact with our customers. We need to make that a top priority this week. I know I can count on you and everyone else to focus on that."

c. Don't use the mystery shopper to do your human resources work!

It is not the job of the mystery shopper to deliver the information that is necessary for you to let the employee go. In fact, it is probably not legal! Besides, it is a sign of a weak manager that can not deliver constructive criticism!

A mystery shopper program takes time to create a well run program that provides the feedback that can be used to further the performance of the company. It is not just about the actual "shopping" it is about the entire program and how the information is used.

By using this tool you will see that providing what your customers say is important to retaining their business shouldn't be a "mystery"!

Source: Anne M. Obarski is "The Eye on Performance!" As a professional speaker and trainer, Anne helps companies focus on the profit building service strategies that will keep their customers coming back. Anne presents nationwide keynotes, break-out sessions and customized training in the area of customer service. She has written "Surprising Secrets of Mystery Shoppers" and "Real World Customer Service Strategies That Work"

1-800-FLOWERS SELLS ITS HOME AND KIDS GIFTS BUSINESS

1-800-FLOWERS.COM, reported today that it has closed on the sale of its Home and Children's Gifts business to PH International, LLC, a Richmond, Virginia-based manufacturer and wholesaler of home décor and garden products. Included in the sale were the Plow and Hearth, Problem Solvers, Wind and Weather, HearthSong and Magic Cabin brands as well as the division's offices and warehouse facility in Madison, VA and a warehouse distribution center located in Vandalia, OH. Sale price for the business was \$17 million (with further adjustments for seasonal working capital).

Jim McCann, CEO of 1-800-FLOWERS.COM, said, "We're very pleased to have concluded this transaction. This will enable us to focus all of our efforts and investments on our core business categories, including our 1-800-FLOWERS.COM consumer floral business, our BloomNet wire service and our Gourmet Food and Gifts Baskets segment – which includes our recently launched 1-800-Baskets.com brand. We believe the new business owner, PH International, LLC, which is vertically integrated in this space, can provide the attention and resources required to enable the business to grow and prosper going forward. As such, we are very pleased to have found a strong and nurturing home for the Home and Children's Gifts associates."

DON RICKLES NEW TELEFLORA CELEBRITY SPOKEPERSON

"Hello Dummies, what kind of hockey puck sends you flowers in a box?" may not be exactly what Teleflora's Talking Flowers say in this year's Super Bowl Ad, but given the reputation of the new spokesperson — and those of the uncensored sarcastic blooms — no one would be that surprised.

Don Rickles, aka Mr. Warmth, is lending his particular brand of barbed charm and his signature voice to Teleflora's wilted flowers-in-a-box Super Bowl ad. The Valentine's Day-themed, 30-second spot will air during the second quarter of the Feb. 7 game. NBC is charging, on average, \$3 million for a 30-second spot and said it has sold 90 percent of the 67 spots.

An original rat pack comedian who's never been known to pull punches during stand-up acts or take it easy on the audience (the aforementioned "dummies"), Rickles should be right at home with a bunch of flowers that, in last year's ad, mocked the recipient's appearance, encouraged her to go home to her cat and told her no one wanted to see her naked. This year's ad's has the same message: You never know what kind of message flowers in a box will send. And the choice of such a recognizable and ribald voice reflects Teleflora's aggressive campaign against drop shippers. Its holiday ad showed a dog peeing on a box of flowers.



"If you are going to be part of the Super Bowl advertising line-up, your spot has to break through the clutter and working with a living legend such as Don Rickles works to our advantage," said Shawn Weidmann, president of Teleflora. "Don is a comic known for his off-beat brand of humor, so who better to voice sarcastic flowers than him?"

Rickles is Teleflora's first celebrity spokesperson.

As for Rickles, he riffs on his own 44-year marriage to encourage other schmucks to order flowers: "Let me tell you something, being married to the same lovely woman for the past 44 years is no easy feat. If I have learned anything, it is to keep my wife happy by sending her lavish gifts," Rickles said in a press release. "Other men can learn from my success and send their wives and girlfriends fresh flowers for birthdays, anniversaries and of course Valentine's Day."

The commercial will continue to air through Friday, Feb. 12 on sports-focused cable channels and primetime cable shows geared towards male viewers. In the run-up to Valentine's Day, Teleflora also will run banner ads across several top providers directly linking users to a landing page that offers click-to-call.

And since sarcasm and social media go together like the Super Bowl and ad hype, Teleflora's decision to take the "naughty vs. nice" campaign viral will give those trash-talking flowers the perfect setting. In the "nice" execution, consumers can send someone a sincere message along with a beautiful, virtual Teleflora bouquet. In the "naughty" version, the spirit of the talking flowers comes alive with consumer-generated or pre-selected sarcastic messages that are "delivered" with un-arranged, uncut, sloppily packed flowers in a box, according to the release. With each "naughty or nice" e-card, Teleflora is offering the sender and recipient a discount code from teleflora.com.

The campaign is primarily directed to consumers, but Weidmann said he hopes member florists on Facebook and Twitter will push the e-card to their customers.

WHO'S CLOCKING IN WITH CUPID?

The supermarket won't close for Cupid.

Good thing your shop will be open on Valentine's Day, right? Well, at least that's the case for the 83 percent of florists who will be open either all day Sunday (56 percent) or part of the day (27 percent). In a recent Zoomerang online survey of retail florists, 9 percent said they'll close for the entire day. The rest (7 percent) had yet to determine their hours, as of Jan. 19.

Two-thirds of suburban shops would likely to be open all day (67 percent) followed closely by shops in urban areas (62 percent). Rural shop owners were least likely to say they would be open all day (3 percent) with the plans of florists in small towns falling in between (45 percent). More than 20 percent of rural shop owners hadn't made up their minds.

Almost 80 percent of shops with annual sales in excess of \$1 million indicated they would be open the entire day. Shops falling into the two smaller sales (those with annual sales below \$300,000 and those with annual sales from \$300,000 to \$499,999) were most likely to be closed on Valentine's Day.

While some consumers will order early to have those office deliveries or take advantage of offered incentives, we know that many will wait until the day of to purchase their Valentine's Day flowers, so it is a smart move for florists to be open and accessible to last-minute shoppers. In fact, consumers will expect it, so it is important -- with all the options available today -- for florists to show their customers they want their business.





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**Flowers Canada Retail represents all segments of the Canadian Retail Floral Industry.
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